

WHAT THE AMERICAN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION
HAS ACCOMPLISHED DURING 1912.¹BY HOWARD H. CLEAVES.²

SINCE it is obvious that this report will fall into the hands of many who are not cognizant of the facts relating to the origin, growth and present status of the bird banding movement in America it might not be amiss to devote a brief space at the outset to a review of that phase of the subject. The mystery of bird migration has tickled and agitated the lay mind and engaged the attention of the ornithologist for we know not how long, and although much has been ascertained by field observers with regard to dates of arrival and departure at given points of the majority of migratory species, practically nothing is known of the movements of individual birds. Even Audubon became interested in this problem, for we read that he placed silver wire rings about the tarsi of a brood of young Phœbes and was rewarded the following year by discovering two of these birds nesting in the same vicinity. Whether through reading of this interesting incident, or hearing of the splendid efforts put forth by certain Europeans who began banding birds as early as 1899, or by reason of a spontaneous desire to investigate, it would be difficult to tell, but the fact remains that not later than 1902 individual experimenters in this country engaged themselves in earnest and comparatively extensive efforts to cast light on the wanderings of birds by the use of inscribed metal bands or rings.

Not until 1908, however, did anything approaching a concerted bird banding movement develop. During that year certain members of the New Haven (Conn.) Bird Club did a small amount of banding, but, realizing how unavailing were the efforts of so few, decided to carry the cause before the Congress of the American Ornithologists' Union at Cambridge, Mass., in November. There

¹ For previous reports of bird banding work in America see 'The Auk,' Vol. XXVI, No. 2, pp. 137-143, April, 1909, and 'The Auk,' Vol. XXVII, No. 2, April, 1910.

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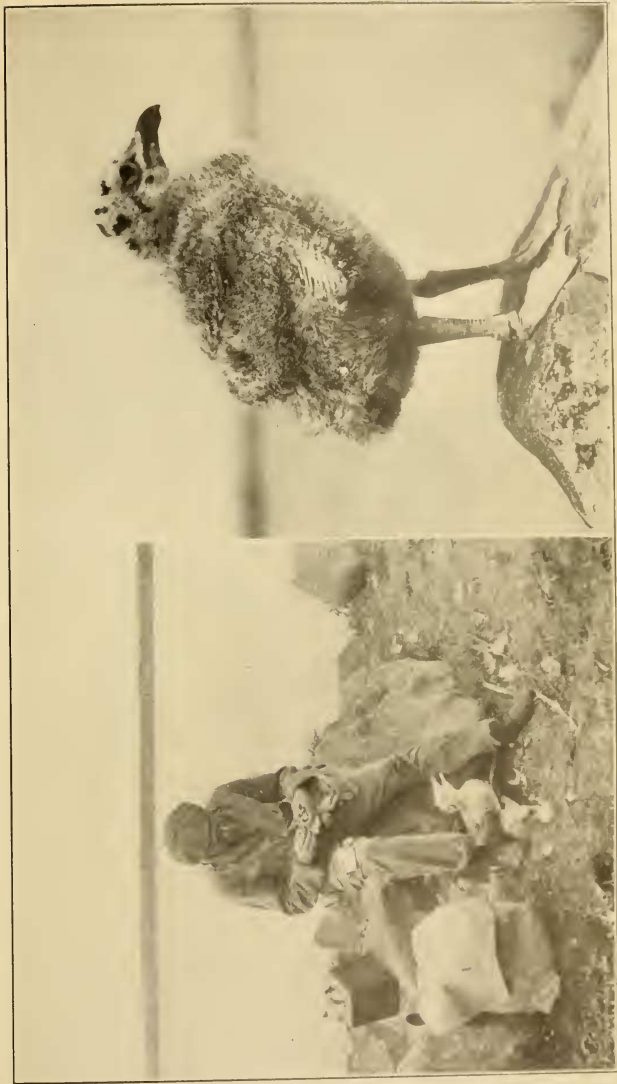
it met with favor and the demand by members of the Union for bands became so pronounced that 5000 were issued prior to the close of the nesting period in 1909. Of this number approximately 1000 were actually placed on birds, and there resulted from these about 30 return records by the end of the year. With interest aroused, the time seemed ripe to give the movement a more concrete form than it had hitherto assumed, the result being that some thirty members of the A. O. U. assembled in New York on the evening of December 8, 1909, and organized the American Bird Banding Association.

Dr. Leon J. Cole, who had been so successfully pushing the work, was chosen President, and together with four able colleagues made up the Executive Committee. In the spring of 1910, however, Dr. Cole was permanently called to Madison, Wis., and partly as a result of his absence, and also on account of the pressing business affairs of all members of the Committee and their widely separated places of residence, the activities of the Association were destined to meet with a serious setback. Practically nothing was accomplished during 1910 nor in 1911, but in the fall of the latter year the Linnæan Society of New York offered to foster the work, much to the relief of those previously encumbered with it. A committee (consisting at first of three and subsequently of five) was appointed and a campaign to raise funds in preparation for the nesting season of 1912 was inaugurated and carried forward with considerable success.

At the outset a change in the type of bands seemed advisable and after inquiring among as many as six different European bird banding organizations the style used by Country Life, London, was adopted. Seven thousand five hundred of these bands, of eight different sizes and bearing the inscription 'NOTIFY AM MUSEUM N. Y' instead of 'NOTIFY THE AUK N Y' were ordered. For the purpose of keeping an exact record of every band issued a special ledger was designed and a filing cabinet for record cards and correspondence was purchased. As the spring of 1912 approached post cards were sent out requesting that applications for bands be submitted. So vigorous was the response resulting from these cards and from notices in 'The Auk,' 'Bird-Lore,' 'Country Life in America' and elsewhere, that four thousand one hundred and

seventy-three bands were distributed among forty-four persons residing in various parts of the country, and representing such widely separated territories as Nova Scotia, Montana and Florida. All told, eight hundred of the bands issued this year (1912) have been actually placed on birds and some of these have already yielded return records possessing a high degree of interest. The total number of *species* banded during the past season is seventy-three, of which the following is a summary:

Species.	No. banded in 1912.	Species.	No. banded in 1912.
Black Guillemot	2	Great Crested Flycatcher	5
Great Black-backed Gull	41	Phoebe	19
Herring Gull	72	Olive-sided Flycatcher	2
Least Tern	7	Blue Jay	9
Leach's Petrel	21	Western Crow	2
White Ibis	28	Bobolink	1
Glossy Ibis	10	Cowbird	2
Bittern	1	Red-winged Blackbird	4
American Egret	145	Thick-billed Redwing	8
Snowy Egret	30	Meadowlark	6
Louisiana Heron	21	Western Meadowlark	5
Little Blue Heron	17	Orchard Oriole	1
Green Heron	2	Brewer's Blackbird	18
Black-crowned Night Heron	10	Purple Grackle	1
Spotted Sandpiper	19	House Finch	1
Killdeer	2	Chestnut-collared Longspur	1
Piping Plover	3	Western Vesper Sparrow	1
Mourning Dove	4	House Sparrow	1
Marsh Hawk	4	Savannah Sparrow	20
Barn Owl	6	White-throated Sparrow	1
Short-eared Owl	8	Chipping Sparrow	6
Screech Owl	2	Field Sparrow	4
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	3	Slate-colored Junco	9
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	Song Sparrow	15
Red-headed Woodpecker	2	Towhee	2
Flicker	25	Cardinal	3
Chimney Swift	5	Rosebreasted Grosbeak	1
Arkansas Kingbird	10	Indigo Bunting	3



1 BANDING BLACK-BACKED GULLS IN THE LAKE GEORGE, N. S., COLONY.
2) YOUNG BLACK-BACKED GULL WITH BAND ON FOOT.

Species.	No. banded in 1912.	Species.	No. banded in 1912.
Dickeissel	2	Louisiana Water-Thrush	3
Scarlet Tanager	2	Catbird	7
Purple Martin	3	Brown Thrasher	9
Barn Swallow	49	Chickadee	5
Red-eyed Vireo	3	Wood Thrush	4
Black and White Warbler	1	Robin	22
Yellow Warbler	8	Western Robin	12
Myrtle Warbler	1	Bluebird	16
Black-throated Green Warbler	1		

The activity of certain of the banders in the field has been remarkable and their observations often noteworthy. For instance, Mr. Oscar E. Baynard, in charge of Bird Island in Orange Lake, Florida, writes that in placing some two hundred and fifty bands on White and Glossy Ibises, Egrets, and Louisiana, Black-crowned Night and Green Herons it was necessary for him to wade about up to his knees in soft mud and guano while the temperature averaged ninety-four degrees in the shade. Mr. Baynard says further:

"I note a White Ibis that I banded last year is nesting here this year, although I cannot determine the number. Have noted two long whites nesting here this year that were here last year — one adult with deformed leg and a youngster with a deformed foot. This last year's youngster has a nest of its own this year and the old one has built in the same bush she used last year. Next year I'll probably be able to note a lot of banded birds returning here to nest."

Mr. A. A. Saunders, of the Forest Service of Montana, is practically the only person doing any banding work in the west, but he is a host in himself and loses no opportunity to put his bands to good use while ranging over his territory. In a letter dated June 25, 1912, Mr. Saunders says:

"I was recently told of an incident of a marked bird returning to the place where it was born, and got as many of the facts as possible, as I believe they will be of interest to the association. The incident was told me by Mr. E. A. Woods, a Forest Ranger on the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and while this information

comes second hand, I believe it is correct. A lady living near Mountain View, Alberta, just north of the United States boundary, found the nest of a Canada Goose and hatched out the eggs under a hen. The young geese lived in the barnyard that summer, and one was marked, by fastening a bell around its neck. In the fall, when a flock of migrating geese flew over, the geese left the barnyard, and joined this flock. Two years later, in the spring, the goose wearing the bell returned and stopped in the barnyard for a few days."

Mr. Ernest Harold Baynes, of Meriden, New Hampshire, is one of the most energetic and faithful banders at present engaged in the work, notwithstanding his many other activities. He tells of a flock of 125 White-winged Crossbills that fed near his home last winter. The birds were so tame that Mr. Baynes had but to stoop and pick them up when he wished to place bands on their legs. Members of the Meriden Bird Club have put up many nesting boxes for Chickadees, Bluebirds, etc., and numbers of these small birds have been banded. Indeed, it goes without saying that any bird that falls into the hands of Mr. Baynes wears a ring on its leg when released.

Mr. Harrison F. Lewis, of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, is another who has accomplished much in the matter of banding the smaller birds. Mr. Lewis told me that when the school children living in the country near him heard of his banding work they all set out to find birds' nests and report them to him. Thus a double end was accomplished — Mr. Lewis was enabled to band dozens of birds without spending much of his own valuable time in looking for nests; and, best of all, the children of the countryside suddenly took a rousing interest in bird life, although perhaps unwittingly. What these children were really keen about was to watch the placing of the tiny aluminum bands on the birds' legs, but to locate the young birds the nests had to be found and in order to find the nests it was necessary to follow the movements and watch the habits of the old birds. It is often difficult to induce children simply to observe things if they think you are trying to make them acquire some knowledge by doing so, but here was a new idea, a material end to be accomplished — something to do. There is no reason why the work of banding birds should not work a similar miracle among

adults — it adds a vigorous interest to bird study; arouses latent interest; or even preserves interest when it tends to wane.

These few cases of the activities of field agents are cited as examples of what hundreds of ornithologists should be doing throughout the continent of North America. Bird banding is not the work of a limited circle but the duty of many, and it is only by extensive banding that results of value can be obtained. Realizing these facts, it has been thought best to welcome the cooperation of all competent bird lovers, regardless of the matter of contributions or annual dues. Any one deemed properly qualified by the Committee may apply for bands and will receive them. On the other hand it is hoped that there are enough people who sufficiently appreciate the value of the work to sustain the necessary financial burden.

A year ago many persons declined to support the work of bird banding on the grounds that not sufficient results had been obtained to establish its practicability. The following return records of banded birds, received within the past twelve months, should rob this objection of its foundation.

On June 7th, 1911, an adult Chimney Swift fluttered down a chimney into the study of Mr. Ernest Harold Baynes in Meriden, New Hampshire, and was promptly banded and released. The band was of the old style and bore the number 6326. At eight o'clock P. M. on June 15, 1912, two Chimney Swifts flew from the chimney into the same room of Mr. Baynes' house where the bird had been caught a year and eight days before. And lo! when these birds were taken in hand and examined one of them proved to be 6326. Remarkable as it may seem, this diminutive creature, less than six inches in length, had travelled hundreds of miles to Central America or elsewhere in the tropics where he spent the winter and then had made the long return journey at the approach of summer and found again the chimney of his choice in a village of far-off New Hampshire. And throughout his journeyings the little aluminum ring had travelled with him and had produced not the least effect on the bird's leg.

Two French Canadians were gunning along a small river near the hamlet of Whitebread in southwestern Ontario, Canada, on August 5, 1912. Blackbirds, their intended booty, were not

numerous and the men were about to return to camp when one suddenly touched the other on the arm and said "You cannot hit him!" In answer to this challenge the second gunner wheeled quickly about and took a difficult chance shot at a fast disappearing Common Tern. There were many terns flying up and down the stream, hovering in the air and plunging for minnows, and it seems strange that the one shot should have borne a band on his leg. The finding of that band resulted in the following letter:

"Dear Friends

As I have never seen you's before but I am writing a few lines to tell you about a ring or piece of tin I found on a sea gull or sea bird. There is thousands of them here but I will not try it again. In examining the bird I found on the left leg 'Notify the Auk or Ark 4590 New York.' So I am doing so to let you know how far this bird travelled. Well I will close. Please write back and let me know if you got this scribbling.

from

August 5th, 1912.

Leo Salois, Box 14, Whitebread, Ont."

On referring to number 4590 among the original banding records it was found that the bird in question had been marked when about two weeks old at Saint Clair Flats Canal, Michigan, on August 13th, 1909, by Mr. S. A. Courtis. By correspondence with Mr. Salois it was learned that the terns were apparently not nesting at Whitebread, Ontario, and it is not unlikely that the birds seen there had bred at Saint Clair Flats and were indulging in a little roving after the nesting season. However this may be, the facts remain that the dead Tern had worn the aluminum anklet for three years minus eight days; had likely made three round trips to the Gulf of Mexico or some other place in the tropics to spend the winter each year since 1909; and was shot but a comparatively short distance from the spot where he was hatched.

A farmer by the name of August Schilling of Evansville, Illinois, was walking across his fields on April 1, 1912, when he frightened a Butcher-bird from a fence post where it had been feeding on what proved to be a Bluebird. On picking up the victim and scrutinizing it Mr. Schilling was astonished to discover that the bird wore a ring on its right leg, and that the ring bore an inscription. He

wrote a letter to 'The Auk,' New York, giving the number of the band, and asked for information, saying:

"Please let me know when the band was put on. There are lots of people would like to know."

This particular Bluebird was one of a brood banded by Dr. R. M. Strong, of the University of Chicago, at West Allis, Wisconsin, on July 5, 1909. The band had been carried for two years and nine months and had apparently caused no inconvenience. It is probable that this Bluebird had made two complete migrations to the south and was about to complete the last lap of a third when he was so unfortunate as to cross the path of *Lanius borealis*.

The letters sent in by persons who have come into possession of banded birds are often intensely interesting, containing information regarding the conditions under which the bird was secured that makes a story of unique character when one goes to the filing cabinet, picks out the banding record and puts the two halves of the tale together. The following is a good example: The owner of a rice plantation on the Lower Cambahee River, Colleton County, South Carolina, sent in word that on November 2, 1912, his 'bird minder' (a man stationed with a gun in the 'rice yard' for the purpose of keeping birds away from the grain) had shot a number of Red-winged Blackbirds and was preparing them for a pot pie when he came upon one wearing a small metal band on its leg. What could be more fraught with interest? The man had, of course, given the number of the band and we at once picked out the card bearing the record of banding and supplied the other end of the story. We found that the bird was banded as a fledgling by Mr. Harry S. Hathaway at Quonochontaug, Charleston, Rhode Island, on June 8, 1912. On being notified of the 'return' Mr. Hathaway wrote:

"I well remember this young Red-wing. I was wading through a small cattail swamp looking for Red-wings' nests when I spied him clinging to a cattail about 2 feet from the water. I made a grab and had him in my hand and a band on in a jiffy. A toss in the air and he awkwardly flew some 20 feet and succeeded in grasping an upright cattail and clung there while I went on."

Who would have supposed that the young Red-wing, reared in a Rhode Island cattail swamp in June, would end his career in a pot pie in South Carolina five months later?

Almost every record that has come in is characterized by some distinguishing feature and would furnish reading matter as interesting as the several returns cited above. Lack of space, however, prevents the publication of these embellishments, although the reader may gather much from the banding and return records in their condensed form at the end of this paper. The percentage of returns, contrary to the predictions of some, has indeed been encouraging; and the point that should be emphasized in connection with these is that they have not in a single instance been due to the handicapping of the birds by the bands. This is proved, firstly, by the fact that the bands have been carried by the birds for such long periods; secondly, by reason of the very conditions attending the taking of each bird; and thirdly, by the fact that the presence of the band on the bird's leg was not in a single case detected until the bird was taken in the hand and examined, and therefore could not possibly have prompted any one to kill the bird for the purpose of recovering the band and satisfying his own curiosity. This sort of thing, by the way, is and should be strongly denounced and discouraged. It is rather the interest in watching for banded birds and even photographing them that should be encouraged.

It would not be wise to spring at conclusions with regard to the significance and meaning of the return records that have thus far been secured. The fact that Mr. Baynes' Chimney Swift returned to its old stand after an absence of nearly a year in the tropics is significant in itself; but before stating that, barring accident, Chimney Swifts invariably return year after year to the same chimney it would be advisable, not to say necessary, to obtain a dozen or even a hundred similar records as corroborative evidence.

Beyond a doubt the greatest progress in the work of banding birds in America has been made during the year just past, but the pace established in that time must be not only maintained but greatly increased. Our interest and enthusiasm must not decline for a moment; the work and aims of the American Bird Banding Association must receive the most zealous support that American ornithologists are capable of imparting.



1. YOUNG MOURNING DOVES, BANDED AT STATEN ISLAND, N. Y. CITY.
2. CHIMNEY SWIFT, BANDED AT MERIDEN, N. H.
3. BARN OWL, BANDED AT STATEN ISLAND, N. Y.

RETURN RECORDS.

(a) The returns in this division are from the old lot of bands issued by Dr. Cole in 1909.

7287. HERRING GULL. *Larus argentatus.*

Banded at Falls Pond, Hamilton County, N. Y., by Francis Harper.

June 27, 1910.

Downy young.

Recovered at Barnegat Inlet, N. J., by William H. Lewis.

September 11, 1911.

Found alive but apparently sick, on the shore.

4590. COMMON TERN. *Sterna hirundo.*

Banded at Saint Clair Flats Canal, Mich., by S. A. Courtis.

August 13, 1909.

About two weeks old. 'On bare sandy island left from dredging of new canals. Birds from one to four weeks of age found there.' S. A. C.

Recovered at Whitebread, Ontario, Canada by Leo Salois.

August 5, 1912.

Shot: birds did not seem to be breeding here and probably wandered over from Saint Clair Flats, after the breeding season.

6625. SPOTTED SANDPIPER. *Actitis macularia.*

Banded at House Is. (Four Bros. Islds.) Lake Champlain, N. Y. by Francis Harper.

July 7, 1910.

Downy young 'caught on July 8 and July 9, examined and found to be in good condition.' F. H.

Recovered at Squantum, Mass., by Hayden Crocker.

September 6, 1910.

Shot among a flock of smaller sandpipers 'on a mudbank in a salt marsh. Did not notice band on leg until I was dressing bird.' H. C.

5557. NORTHERN FLICKER. *Colaptes auratus luteus.*

Banded at Logan Park Cemetery, Sioux City, Ia., by Prof. T. C. Stephens.

June 11, 1910.

Male nestling, one of a brood of seven.

Recovered at Bayard, Kas., by I. Decker.

November 20, 1910.

Captured in a barn; injured in capturing and afterwards killed. Band was not noticed until the bird was dead.